1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

CHAPTER V

BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, AND ADOLESCENCE

842 THE LOVE of children, and the prestige which a man gains as head of a large family, are factors that go far to explain the desire for a numerous progeny. In this not only is he aided by his own sophistication in matters of sex — for in Haitian peasant culture, one encounters no such conventionalized naïveté as the ignorance of physiological paternity found in certain other, non-African societies — but his desire is furthered as well by the absence of contraceptives, and the emphasis laid by Church, State, and African tradition on the desirability of many offspring. Though situations do arise when, because of illicit relations between a man and woman that result in conception, an abortion is held necessary, usually as soon as a woman discovers that she has conceived, she proceeds to take the necessary protective measures. First she goes to the old women of her own family, who give her herbs for the "three baths" she must take on each of the three succeeding days. This accomplished, she next visits a priest or priestess of the *vodun* cult who has the confidence of her family or of her husband's, and procures other herbs also for the purpose of preparing baths, and, in addition, a magic charm to wear about her neck or about her waist. This charm protects both herself and the child in her womb against the evil eye or any

843 [847] [951]

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000 the phrase: "This is natural." Children are not spaced, for
842 normally a man resumes intercourse with his wife the second
875 or third month after childbirth. Except for the drinking of
163 coconut milk and salt, which is believed to be effective in
833 preventing conception if taken before intercourse, contraceptives are not known to women, which means that pregnancies
162 follow in rapid succession. Families are not too large, how-
165 ever, despite this, those numbering seven or eight children being rare, even in the hills. The reason for this is a high incidence of infant mortality, which is obvious despite the
● 847 absence of vital statistics. Abortions are usually resorted to by young women, who sustain the operation done by the uncertain skill of an old woman, in the fear that bearing a child will later stand in the way of a desirable legal marriage.
842 Some men, however, take the precaution of placing a grain
875 of native salt on the tongue while having intercourse during
263 an illicit affair, believing that this will be effective in preventing conception.

842 A childless woman first goes to a *vodun* priest, to have him
789 determine by divination if a co-wife has not invoked magic
787 against her. If her question receives an affirmative answer, she
[154] acquires a "counter-charm" to offset the effect of the other
[595] woman's magic. Should such a charm be ineffective, she would
[788] offer her prayers before the shrines of the saints and make
[539] pilgrimages to such sacred places as Saut d'Eau, there phrasing her petition to the Virgin in some manner such as the prayer overheard as a woman lighted a candle and held it in her hand before placing it on a sacred rock:

> *"Vièrge Miracles, Manman, voilà, depuis six ans depuis qui moins marié; moin apé vivre seul avec pauvre malhereux moin-a. Ça fait trois fois moin vini nan pié ou. Pas 'blié mandé moin fait ou, pour charité, moin ou petit pitite. Moin va minnin li ba ou. Moin apé parti, Manman, s' ou' pli, songé ça pitite m' mandé ou.—*